PROSPECT;

OR

VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD.

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Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 9.

THE JEWISH GOD AND THE EGYPTIAN KING STILL AT VARIANCE.

THE ſingular nature of the conteſt which exiſted for ſome time between the Hebrew divinity, and the king of Egypt ought to excite very ſerious and important reflections in the minds of thoſe who believe in revelation. Leſſons of wiſdom and deductions of an incontrovertible character flow irreſiſtibly from the peruſal of theſe ſtrange paſſages of holy writ; not becauſe there is any wiſdom contained in the paſſages themſelves, but becauſe the incongruity of detail and of principle herein exhibited muſt excite in the intellectual powers of man thoſe ſtrong and forcible contemplations which form the baſis of wiſdom and lead to interesting concluſions. It is impoſſible ſeriouſly to indulge, for a ſingle moment, the idea that the real God of nature was in any ſhape whatever concerned in the ſtrange altercations which are ſaid to have taken place between Pharaoh and the god of Moſes. Pharaoh ſets at defiance the power and the commands of the latter —his obſtinacy and his hard heartedneſs are ſo audaciouſly and ſo repeatedly exhibited, that the omnipotence of Jehovah in the preſent caſe becomes extremely queſtionable. How eaſy would it have been for him to have bowed the ſtubborn will of Pharaoh and reduce him to the placid condition of humble obedience; inſtead of this he hardens his heart, and then puniſhes with new calamities and with freſh ſeverity this royal obduracy. He ſends, according to the account contained in this chapter, a number of new plagues, for the ſpecial purpoſe of procuring

an emancipation for his choſen people; theſe miraculous exhibitions of divine vengeance—theſe denunciations of the will of heaven—theſe terrifying expreſsions of the vindictive wrath of the moſt high are ſpurned at by Pharaoh, and, according to this account, treated with ſovereign contempt. The firſt miracle related in this chapter, and which, if ever performed, ought to have been ſufficient in all conſcience to have ſtruck terror into the obdurate heart of the Egyptian tyrant, relates to the killing of all the cattle, horſes, ſheep, &c. belonging to the Egyptians, and marking with benign diſtinction the property of a ſimilar kind which belonged to the Iſraelites. Can any man read the account of this wonderful miracle and preſume that there ever was a man on earth hardy enough to face the ſupreme power of nature, and bid defiance to that omnipotence by which he was attacked? No certainly not; but the ſame ſingular explanation of the difficulty occurs here as upon former occaſions. God hardens the heart of Pharaoh and thus by an act of divine power he is induced to regret the impreſſive inſtructions which would otherwiſe have been derived from ſuch ſplendid manifeſtations of the power and will of heaven.—The next miraculous paragraph contained in this chapter, commences at the eighth verſe and contains a fooliſh and conjuring account about the Lord's commanding Moſes and Aaron to throw hands full of aſhes up into the air; that the aſhes afterwards became duſt over all the land of Egypt, and that the duſt afterwards broke out in the form of boils and blains upon man and upon beaſt. When this dirty miracle had been wrought the paragraph cloſes by a poſitive declaration that God ſtill hardened the heart of Pharaoh, ſo that he would not let the people go. (See verſe 12). What was the uſe of working ſuch a miracle as this, or indeed any other when it appears according to this ſtory that God employed his own power to defeat the effect? The next paragraph in this chapter from the 13th to the 16th verſes incluſive contains, firſt, a ſevere threat that God would ſend all his plagues upon Pharaoh, and try once more whether he could be reduced to a

ſtate of obedience or not; and ſecondly a poſitive aſſertion that for this ſame purpoſe he had raiſed Pharaoh up, and alſo that his name might be declared throughout all the earth. This ſhameful aſcription of villainy and wickedneſs in reſpect to the character of the Creator is diſguſting to every genuine Theiſt, and proves that the writers of this book had no juſt conceptions concerning the eternal God or the attributes eſſential to his character. God could never reveal a book in which his own character is traduced and calumniated; he never could be the author of his own infamy, or concerned in propagating the ſlanderous tales by which the glory of his own exiſtence muſt be for ever tarniſhed. Theſe ſacred writings as they are called are nothing more than the ignorant effuſions of ſcribbling and fooliſh fanatics; they will paſs away in the ſilent march of time, while ſcience and virtue will become immortal in the eſtimation of enlightened poſterity.

COMMUNICATION.

Of the Religion of Deiſm compared with the Chriſtian Religion, and the ſuperiority of the former over the latter.

Every perſon of whatever religious denomination he may be is a DEIST in the firſt article of his Creed. Deiſm from the latin word DEUS, God, is the belief of a God, and this belief is the firſt article of every man's creed.

It is on this article, univerſally conſented to by all mankind, that the Deiſt builds his church, and here he reſts. Whenever we ſtep aſide from this article, by mixing it with articles of human invention, we wander into a labyrinth of uncertainty and fable, and become expoſed to every kind of impoſition by pretenders to revelation. The Perſian ſhews the *Zendavista* of Zoroaſter the lawgiver of Perſia, and calls it the *divine law*; the Bremen ſhews the *ſhaſter*, revealed, he ſays, by God to Brama,

and given to him out of a cloud; the Jew ſhews what he calls the law of Moſes, given, he ſays, by God on the Mount Sinai; the Chriſtian ſhews a collection of books and epiſtles written by nobody knows who, and called the New Teſtament, and the Mahometan ſhews the Koran, given, he ſays, by God to Mahomet; each of theſe calls itſelf *revealed religion*, and the *only* true word of God, and this the followers of each profeſs to believe from the habit of education, and each believes the others are impoſed upon.

But when the divine gift of reaſon begins to expand itſelf in the mind and calls man to reflection, he then reads and contemplates God in his works and not in books pretending to be revelation. The Creation is the bible of a true believer in God. Every thing in this vaſt volume inſpires him with ſublime ideas of the Creator. The little and paltry, and often obſcene, tales of the bible ſink into wretchedneſs when put in compariſon with this mighty work. The Deiſt needs none of thoſe tricks and ſhows called miracles to confirm his faith, for what can be a greater miracle than the creation itſelf and his own exiſtence.

There is a happineſs in Deiſm, when rightly underſtood, that is not to be found in any other ſyſtem of religion. All other ſyſtems have ſomething in them that either ſhock our reaſon or are repugnant to it, and man, if he thinks at all, muſt ſtifle his reaſon in order to force himſelf to believe them. But in Deiſm our reaſon and our belief become happily united. The wonderful ſtructure of the univerſe and every thing we behold in the ſyſtem of creation prove to us, far better than books can do, the exiſtence of a God, and at the ſame time proclaim his attributes. It is by the exerciſe of our reaſon that we are enabled to contemplate God in his works and imitate him in his ways. When we ſee his care and goodneſs extended over all his creatures, it teaches us our duty towards each other, while it calls forth our gratitude to him. It is by forgetting God in his works, and running after

books of pretended revelation that man has wandered from the ſtrait path of duty and happineſs, and become by turns the victim of doubt and the dupe of deluſion.

Except in the firſt article in the Chriſtian creed, that of believing in God, there is not an article in it but fills the mind with doubt as to the truth of it the inſtant man begins to think. Now every article in a creed that is neceſſary to the happineſs and ſalvation of man ought to be as evident to the reaſon and comprehenſion of man as the firſt article is, for God has not given us reaſon for the purpoſe of confounding us, but that we ſhould uſe it for our own happineſs and his glory.

The truth of the firſt article is proved by God himſelf and is univerſal, for *the creation is of itself demonstration of the existence of a Creator.* But the ſecond article, that of God's begetting a ſon, is not proved in like manner, and ſtands on no other authority than that of tale. Certain books in what is called the New Teſtament tell us that Joſeph dreamed an angel told him ſo. (Matthew chap. 1, v. 20.) "And behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto Joſeph in a dream, ſaying, Joſeph thou ſon of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the holy ghoſt." The evidence upon this article bears no compariſon with the evidence upon the firſt article, and therefore is not entitled to the ſame credit, and ought not to be made an article in a creed, becauſe the evidence of it is defective, and what evidence there is, is doubtful and ſuſpicious. We do not believe the firſt article on the authority of books, whether called Bibles or Korans, nor yet on the viſionary authority of dreams, but on the authority of God's own viſible works in the creation. The nations who never heard of ſuch books, nor of ſuch people as Jews, Chriſtians, or Mahometans, believe the exiſtence of a God as fully as we do, becauſe it is ſelf-evident. The work of man's hands is a proof of the exiſtence of man as fully as his perſonal appearance would be. When we ſee a watch we have as poſitive evidence of the

exiſtence of a watch-maker as if we ſaw him; and in like manner the creation is evidence to our reaſon and our ſenſes of the exiſtence of a Creator. But there is nothing in the works of God that is evidence that he begat a ſon, nor any thing in the ſyſtem of creation that corroborates ſuch an idea, and therefore we are not authoriſed in believing it. What truth there may be in the ſtory that Mary, before ſhe was married to Joſeph, was kept by one of the Roman ſoldiers, and was with child by him, I leave to be ſettled between the Jews and the Chriſtians. The ſtory however has probability on its ſide, for her huſband Joſeph ſuſpected and was jealous of her, and was going to put her away. "Joſeph her huſband being a "juſt man, and not willing to make her a public example, "was going to put her away privately." (Matthew chap. 1, v. 19).

I have already ſaid that "whenever we ſtep aſide from "the firſt article (that of believing in God) we wander "into a labyrinth of uncertainty," and here is evidence of the juſtneſs of the remark, for it is impoſsible for us to decide who was Jeſus Chriſt's father. But preſumption can aſſume any thing, and therefore it makes Joſeph's dream to be of equal authority with the exiſtence of God, and to help it on it calls it revelation. It is impoſſible for the mind of man in its ſerious moments, however it may have been entangled by education, or beſet by prieſt craft, not to ſtand ſtill and doubt upon the truth of this article and of its creed. But this is not all.

The ſecond article of the Chriſtian creed having brought the ſon of Mary into the world (and this Mary according to the Chronological tables was a girl of only fifteen years of age when this ſon was born) the next article goes on to account for his being begotten, which was, that when he grew a man he ſhould be put to death to expiate, they ſay, the ſin that Adam brought into the world by eating an apple or ſome kind of forbidden fruit.

But though this is the creed of the church of Rome, from whence the Proteſtants borrowed it, it is a creed which that church has manufactured of itſelf, for it is not

contained in, nor derived from, the book called the New Teſtament. The four books called the Evangeliſts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which give, or pretend to give, the birth, ſayings, life, preaching, and death of Jeſus Chriſt, make no mention of what is called the fall of man, nor is the name of Adam to be found in any of thoſe books, which it certainly would be if the writers of them believed that Jeſus was begotten, born, and died for the purpoſe of redeeming mankind from the ſin which Adam had brought into the world. Jeſus never ſpeaks of Adam himſelf, of the Garden of Eden, nor of what is called the fall of man. Neither did the early Chriſtians believe the ſtory of the fall of man to be fact, but held it to be allegory. The perſon called St. Auguſtine, ſays in his City of God, that the adventure of Eve and the ſerpent, and the account of Paradiſe, were generally conſidered in his time as allegory, and he treats them as ſuch himſelf without attempting to give any explanation of them, but thinks a better might be given than had been offered.

Origen, another of the ancient fathers of the Church, treats the account of the creation in Genesis, and the story of the Garden of Eden and the fall of man, as fable or fiction.

What man of good ſenſe, ſays he, can ever perſuade himſelf that there was a firſt, a ſecond, and a third day, and that each of thoſe days had a night, when there was yet neither ſun, moon, nor ſtars! (N. B. According to the account in Genesis, chap. 1, the ſun and moon was not made until the fourth day)—What man, continues he can be ſtupid enough to believe that God acting the part of a gardener had planted a garden in the eaſt; that the tree of life was a real tree, and that the fruit of it had the virtue of making thoſe who eat of it live forever.

To be continued.

Profession of faith of a Savoyard Curate, from Rousseau, continued from our last.

It is in the insatiable hearts of mankind, corroding with envy, avarice, and ambition, that their avenging pasions punish them for their vices, amidst all the false appearances of prosperity. Where is the necesity of seeking a hell in another life, when it is to be found, even in this, in the hearts of the wicked?

Where our momentary necesities or senseles desires have an end, there ought our pasions and our vices to end also. Of what perversity can pure spirits be susceptible? As they stand in need of nothing, to what end should they be vicious? If destitute of our grosser senses, all their happines consists in the contemplation of things, they cannot be desirous of any thing but good; and whoever ceases to be wicked, is it posible he should be eternally miserable? This is what I am inclined to believe on this head, without giving myself the trouble to determine positively concerning the matter.—O righteous and merciful Being! whatever be thy decrees, I acknowledge their rectitude: if thou punishest the wicked, my weak reason is dumb before thy justice; but if the remorse of these unfortunate wretches is to have an end, if the same fate is one day to attend us all, my soul exults in thy praise. Is not the wicked man after all, my brother? How often have I been tempted to resemble him, in partaking of his vices? O! may he be delivered from his misery; may he cast off also that malignity which accompanies it; may he be ever happy as myself: so far from exciting my jealousy, his happiness will only add to mine.

To be continued.

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